



## “Live and Work On Purpose” Newsletter

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### **Marguerite’s Gift**

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#### ***A Story***

Marguerite was a family friend. Even though I was in my teens and Marguerite in her eighties when we became close friends, I remember her from different times in my childhood. I remember when my second-grade class took a field trip through the school’s neighborhood and stopped in Marguerite’s yard to observe the grand-daddy frog that lived in the hollow of that big oak tree in her front yard. I also remember her as my third-grade substitute teacher. She always appeared to be a character from another place in time with her cat-eye shaped, rhinestone-studded spectacles and the aroma of mothballs coming from her dress. On another occasion, I remember her asking me, as a fourth grader, to stop by the Sunday School class she taught at First Baptist Church and sing a song. She always had a wide smile and enjoyed a good laugh with her little bird-like voice.

As I entered my teenage years, Marguerite was alone. Her husband had died a number of years before and her only son lived on the West coast, far from our little hamlet in Oklahoma. She lived alone in that big, dark, spooky-looking house on the corner where I once observed the grandpa frog with my second grade buddies. She didn’t drive and would often find herself alone during the holidays. Mom and Dad decided to invite Marguerite to our home for Thanksgiving dinner and, when I was sixteen with my first little car and a new driver’s license in hand, I had the job of picking up Marguerite to bring her to our home for the event. I pulled in front of Marguerite’s house on that sunny Thanksgiving morning and, despite the fact that she was close to ninety years old, she popped out her front door, made sure it was locked behind her, and practically skipped along the length of her front porch, hopped onto the yard, and waddled, in a half-run, to my car. All the way back home, we talked (or she chirped) about the beautiful day, how she loved the autumn, and how thankful she was for the invitation to our home for Thanksgiving dinner.

Over the years, Marguerite joined our family for many special occasions; nearly every Thanksgiving and Christmas, birthdays, and special family gatherings. She always was the life of the party, telling stories of her younger days when she taught school in a one-room schoolhouse and of later years when she taught for decades in the larger public school. Marguerite had become part of the family. Despite her cheery personality, deep in my heart I always felt sorry for Marguerite. She was alone. I sometimes wondered what it must feel like to be old and alone. As I went away to college and began my adult life, I often wondered if I would grow old and alone like Marguerite. I wondered if Marguerite



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felt her life had held purpose. I wondered if I would grow old and wonder what difference my life had made. These thoughts made me sad and a little frightened.

A number of years later when I was back home for the weekend, mom told me Marguerite was in the nursing home and was not doing well. Mom said she thought Marguerite would enjoy a visit from me before I drove back to my home. On the way out of town that Saturday evening, I pulled my car into the parking lot of the nursing home on the edge of town. I went inside and soon found Marguerite’s room. I walked in and saw her. The room was dark, illuminated only by a small lamp next to the bed. She was lying on the bed, fully clothed in the old dress she had worn that day. I thought I smelled moth balls. She was wearing a pair of sunglasses in the darkened room and was listening to music through a pair of headphones. Knowing she couldn’t hear me, I slowly walked to the bed and touched her hand. She removed her headphones and in her little bird-voice asked, “Who is it?” It was at that moment I realized Marguerite was now blind. I said, “It’s Brad. How are you?” She began chirping again, asking how I was doing and telling me about her day. She was 102 years old.

After talking for a few minutes, Marguerite drifted off to sleep. I sat in the chair opposite her bed and just looked at her. Suddenly, the sorrow I felt for her over the years turned to a feeling of peace. At that moment, I began to realize that Marguerite had not had a life lacking purpose. Instead, she had lived a life full of meaning and calling. She had been my teacher! Of course, she had taught school and had been a Sunday School teacher, but she had been more than that. She had taught me about life. She taught me to love and trust God. She taught me to share my talents with others. She taught me to appreciate beautiful autumn days. She taught me that happiness is a choice.

As I watched my little bird-like friend sleeping in the nursing home bed, I began to realize how many other young lives she had touched in the same way as mine. In her forty years of teaching she must have touched literally thousands of young lives, teaching them the same life principles she had taught me. Was this an accidental life; a life that had this impact on others by mistake? Of course not! I now realize Marguerite had a mission. She gave so many of us a gift. Her gift was from God and she gave that gift to each of us with integrity, purpose, and zeal.

What is your gift this season? For you, I'm hoping for a wonderful Christmas season and a purposeful 2012!